Many of the warriors were similarly attended, he saw when he plucked up enough courage to look around; but some were alone, served by the general slaves. He stiffened in fear as he caught sight of Savak amoung this group.

"Do not fear," Spock told him quietly. "You belong to me now."

When the food had been cleared away the entertainment began, a display by a group of accomplished dancers. In accordance with the rule of the camp all were male, but the dance was sensual and explicit. As the dancing grew wilder, more abandoned, Spock drew Kirk down to lie beside him, loosening his tunic as he did so. The Vulcan's own robe fell open, but even as Kirk flinched nervously his master leaned down to whisper reassuringly in his ear. To an observer it must have seemed that they were fondling each other intimately, but only they knew that Spock's hand moved under Kirk's tunic without touching his skin.

"Well, Spock, what do you think of my little pet?"

At the sound of the hated voice Kirk started convulsively and looked up; Savak, flushed with wine, was standing beside Spock's couch.

"Your pet?" A slanting eyebrow rose. "I was under the impression that he was mine."

"But surely you will give me the chance to win him back?"

"No," Spock replied absently, taking Kirk's hand and examining it closely.

"You would refuse a challenge?" Savak's voice rang clearly and Kirk paled. The Vulcan was trying to provoke Spock into another contest, and this time his master might lose.

"What is going on here?" Sensing the dispute the other warriors had gathered round, and Savak answered the Warleader.

"Selon, Spock refuses a challenge."

"For what reason?" The leader glanced enquiringly at Spock. "I know that you are no coward."

"I am not, but I do not choose to wager for the stakes he will set."

"It must be something you value if you will not risk losing it."

"Savak would wager for the Human. I do not choose that he should again possess the slave."

"Why not?"

"Leader, I won the slave in fair trial. He was delivered to me in such a condition that I could not make use of him. Your own healer will testify to his injuries. A beautiful and valuable slave was wantonly abused to such an extent that he could have been rendered useless for life."

"It was my right," Savak blustered. The leader gestured him to silence.

"I do not dispute that, but have you learned nothing here? A warrior is expected to make the best use of his resources. As no intelligent man runs a fine hunting cat to exhaustion, so is it shameful to damage a valuable slave. Is the youth defiant?"

"No, Leader. He is obedient and willing," Spock replied before Savak could speak.

"Then you have foolishly misused a valuable possession, the prize I myself chose. Spock has acted responsibly. I forbid you to wager for the slave. It is settled."

"If you would care to name other stakes, Savak?" Spock asked coolly. Savak turned away without the civility of a reply. Shortly afterward Spock took his leave of the leader and beckoned Kirk to follow him back to their tent.

Later that night Kirk was engaged in one of his regular duties, combing Spock's flowing hair. There was something curiously pleasant about the feel of the black silk gliding through his fingers, and he knew that Spock liked the attention.

"My lord," the Human began hesitantly, "I...must thank you."

"No need," Spock replied casually. "I would not see any dependent fall into the hands of such a one as I now know Savak to be. You are a beautiful and valuable creature, and it would be wasteful to allow you to be damaged.

"Yes, lord." Kirk felt annoyed and somehow disappointed at this reminder that the Vulcan considered him only as an attractive, exotic pet with only sufficient intelligence to make himself useful He was grateful that Spock did not want to sleep with him, of course, but still.... With a faint sigh he put down the comb and stood back.

"I will retire now." Spock rose and stretched. "You may bathe, if you wish."

"Thank you, lord." Kirk retired to the screened-off section of the tent where the bath was kept; one of the general slaves emptied it during the night, but Spock permitted him to use the water when he had finished with it--another sign of favor his fellow slaves envied. They had to make do with the icy waters of the lake near the camping ground.

As he lay idly enjoying the warm, herb-scented water, Kirk felt himself becoming sexually aroused and slid his hand down over his belly to grasp his penis.

Since leaving Savak he had had no sexual outlet. Even if he had had a mind to seek a lover among the other slaves, he knew it was forbidden. A pleasure slave's body belonged only to his master, whether he made use of it or not, and for a slave to seek his own pleasure merited severe punishment. Realistically Kirk knew it would have been unfair, and impossible, to take advantage of Spock's word and then seek another. Nor did any of the general slaves attract him. Yet his only release had been in masturbation, and he sometimes longed to feel a warm, responsive body pressed to his.

Gloomily, he acknowledged that as long as he remained the property of a warrior, he would never have the opportunity to have a woman; he did not fully understand why, but he knew the warriors avoided the company of females. His thoughts turned again to the stories about the escaped slaves. They had a degree of freedom, though their lives were filled with hideous danger. He would never forget the screams of the tortured slave. And escape from the camp was all but impossible. The hunting cats could track him easily. But one day, one day his chance might come. If he could reach the mountains, contact one of the nomadic bands--perhaps there were females among the escaped slaves, and if not, at least the choice would be his...someone to love, to return his love....

He allowed his mind to drift as he milked himself slowly, and only when he felt the slickness of his semen in his hand did he realize his fantasy had taken a most unexpected turn....